

PRESS COVERAGE



50% Grey: Contemporary Czech photography reconsidered

January 29 — March 28, 2010

1. Art Margins, 1.21.2010
2. Art Margins, 5.3.2010
3. Chicago Tribune, 1.3.2010
4. Flavorpill 2.16.2010
5. Flavorpill 2.18.2010
6. Gallery Guide, Mar.2010
7. New City Art, 2.22.2010
8. New City Art, 3.1.2010

7 Calendar

Event

Title: 50% Grey: Contemporary Czech Photography Reconsidered at the MOCP

When: 01.29.2010 - 03.28.2010

Category: [Exhibitions](#)

Description

This exhibition brings together the work of six contemporary Czech artists (two of whom work collaboratively). All of these featured artists reflect on the materials of photography and find poetic resonance in a lack of obviously poetic subject matter. As the analog technology of photography fades away, these artists subversively employ a variety of photographic materials to investigate the potential for photographic veracity, and all of them push the idea of framing and selection to counter any perception of objectivity the medium might impart.



am announcements

From the Archive

ARTMargins has published more than 500 articles, reviews and interviews since 1999. [Click here to browse the ARTMargins archive.](#)

FORUM: Where's The Margins?

Twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, ARTMargins is launching an Open Forum on Marginality. The forum is dedicated to the status of the periphery in politics, art, and critical discourse today. [Click here to read responses and add your comments.](#)

focus on slovenia

- [Creating Context: Zdenka Badovinac on Eastern Europe's Missing Histories \(Interview\)](#)
- [Bogoslav Kalaš: the Ghost in the \(Painting-\) Machine \(Article\)](#)
- [A Short Guide to Contemporary Art in Slovenia \("Short Guide Series"\) \(Article\)](#)
- [Barbara Kukovec \(Online Gallery\)](#)

events

<< May 10 >>						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

ARTMargins Home >> 3 Exhibitions >> 50% Grey: Contemporary Czech Photography

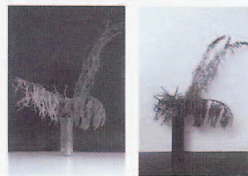
50% Grey: Contemporary Czech Photography Reconsidered at the Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago (Exhib. Review)

Susan Snodgrass (Chicago)

Monday, 03 May 2010 20:36

50% GREY: CONTEMPORARY CZECH PHOTOGRAPHY RECONSIDERED, MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY AT COLUMBIA COLLEGE, CHICAGO, JANUARY 29, 2010—MARCH 28, 2010.

In 1999, ten years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Piotr Piotrowski described the former East as "the grey zone of Europe." "There is no doubt that the historico-geographical coordinates of Central Europe are in a state of flux," he writes, "that we are experiencing both historical and geographical transformation, that we are between two different times, between two different spatial shapes."¹



50% Grey: Contemporary Czech Photography Reconsidered is co-curated by Karel Cisar, an independent curator in Prague, and Karen Irvine of the Museum of Contemporary Photography. The exhibition situates current strands of Czech photographic practices within this "grey zone," exploring the conceptual and geographic spaces of being in-between. Works by Stepan Grygar, the collaborative duo Lukas Jasansky and Martin Polak,

Markéta Othová, Michal Pechoucek, and Jiri Thyn are positioned within a trajectory that connects them to Czech photographers of the classical avant-garde, whose innovative works were on display in a separate show on the third floor gallery.

United by a penchant for working mainly in black and white and with more traditional darkroom printing techniques, as opposed to more digitized processes, these artists reflect upon the medium itself, using traditional technologies whose potential, the curators argue, have not been exhausted. In several works, everyday images, including street scenes, still lifes, and various interiors record aspects of place, yet are divested of any symbolic meaning in compositions that occupy a nebulous space between abstraction and representation. Thus, photography becomes a material, conceptual expression instead of a documentary one.



While Piotrowski provides a political metaphor for contextualizing these artists' works, the exhibition's title is actually taken from the series *50% Grey* (2009) by Thyn, examples of which are included here. Two gelatin silver prints from the subseries *Untitled/Test Strip*, a plant-filled courtyard and a female nude, are composed from vertical test strips, a zone system created by Ansel Adams in which film is exposed for "middle grey" to achieve the best image

values between black and white.² In the photo installation *Positive-Negative*, also from the same series, Thyn reduced photography to its basic elements: glass negatives silk-screened with colorful patterns and black-and-white photograms made from the same negatives, which were then placed side by side on shelves attached horizontally to the wall. Other works, such as three untitled C-prints depicting the artist's worktable and *4 Corners of the Hilton Hotel* (2007-08), in Prague, emphasize the geometry of each scene.

In their well-known, black-and-white series *Abstractions* (1994-96), Jasansky/Polak similarly reduce simple objects—like a plaid seat cushion, a metal toolbox, a potato, or two dishcloths—to their basic formal essence. Shot in extreme close-up and in a straightforward style that has become the artists' trademark, these objects are distilled

search artmargins

Advanced Search

newsletter signup

share this page



news

- [Art History on the Map in East-Central Europe \(Brno, November 2010\)](#)
- [First International Włodzimierz Borowski Conference](#)
- [New Museum of Contemporary Art in Perm, Russia](#)
- [Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw to Open in 2014](#)
- [ARTMargins Goes Mobile](#)
- [ARTMargins Forum on Curatorial Practice](#)

popular articles

- [Tanja Ostojić's Aesthetics of Affect and PostIdentity \(Series "New Critical Approaches"\)](#)
- [A Little Mermald in the World of Russian Advertising \("Rusalka" Roundtable, #5\)](#)
- [Gábor Ősz \(Online Gallery\)](#)
- [Boris Groys, "Art Power" \(Book Review\)](#)
- [Yevgeniy Fiks: "Communist Party USA Commemorative Stamps" \(Online Gallery\)](#)

twitter @artmargins

twitter

Get updates on new interviews, exhibitions, articles, reviews and events.

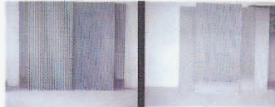
facebook

from their domestic origins and reside in the realm of the nonobjective. The same strategy is applied to the twenty-five works from their more recent series *Brussels Sprouts* (2007). The artists were invited to make a public work for the European Parliament in Brussels. However, they instead opted to photograph their existing art collection, mainly gifts from other countries. Shot with a cool, distant eye, the artists edit the nationalist content from the works in the Parliament's collection; yet, this position of aesthetic neutrality is, in itself, a political act.



Othová's photographs share certain affinities with those of Jasansky/Polak, in which quotidian objects become studies in form and visual perception. Often working in a serial format, Othová pairs similar or related images, creating oppositional plays not unlike Thyn. In one untitled work, a light-hued floral still life is presented against a dark backdrop, in tandem with an image of the same still life rendered in dark hues against a light backdrop. In *Lécon de photographie* (2007), a simple white box is shot within a shallow white field in a series of seven gelatin silver prints stacked vertically. There appears to be little variation, except for the changing position of the box's lid. Shunning any interest in photography as a record of reality, Othová reveals, instead, the varying and rich tonalities of white, as well as photography's ability to manifest its own self-referential narratives.

Grygar's liminal photographs also elicit active viewing across sequential images. A street scene captured from above is repeated in six C-prints that comprise *Street (Prague)*, 2002. Shot at night during a snowstorm, the view below is veiled by a pattern of snowflakes and light from the artist's own flash, creating an abstract composition that reinforces photography as an aesthetic versus documentary medium. This idea is taken further in an untitled series in which a cardboard box cut with rectangular squares becomes a prop for perceptual investigations in geometry, form, and light.



The serial explorations of Othová and Grygar are extended in the works of Michal Pechoucek, whose black-and-white series *Filmogram #1* (2007) and color digital projection *Pater Noster* (2005) occupy the grey zone between photography and film.

Didactic text states that the title of the latter is the first two words of the Lord's Prayer; ironically it also refers to a kind of elevator lift. Still images of a young man on a ladder and various objects (books, vases, busts) artfully arranged on shelves continuously scroll up and down, suggesting an interplay between the secular and the spiritual.

Formal connections between the works by artists represented in 50% Grey and those by key figures of Czech modernism were reinforced in the companion exhibition *Recent Acquisitions of Czech Photography* from the Baruch Foundation. Anne and Jacques Baruch opened a gallery in Chicago in 1967. The following year they went to Prague, initiating a life-long passion for and dedication to Czech art, despite political odds. Some 200 photographs were gifted to the Museum of Contemporary Photography, forty-four of which were on view, including works by Frantisek Drtikol, Josef Ehm, Emilia Medkova, Jaroslav Rossler, Jan Saudek and Josef Sudek, among others.



Despite the art historical links suggested above, 50% Grey is not a portrait of national identity. Rather the exhibition places current Czech photography between past and present, as a means for engaging both artist and viewer in zones of productive flux.



ART

Art illuminates the darkest season

Visual bright spots to enjoy in bleak weather

By Lauren Viera
TRIBUNE REPORTER

Who says art is dead in winter? Here are 10 visual bright spots during our bleak weather:

Anna Shteynshleyger photographs at Renaissance Society. Taking a cue from last fall's Allan Sekula show, the Ren again presents the work of an photographer who captures culture by shooting. *5811 S. Ellis Ave., 773-702-8670; renaissancesociety.org, through Feb. 14*

"Picturing the Studio" at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago's Sullivan Galleries. Every great work begins in the studio. That's the loose theme behind this show featuring more than 30 artists. *33 S. State St., 7th Floor, 312-629-6635; saic.edu, through Feb. 13*

Angel Otero at Kavi Gupta Gallery and Chicago Cultural Center. The reason abstract painter Otero is featured at two very different venues simultaneously? This 28-year-old is onto something big. *Kavi Gupta Gallery, 835 W. Washington Blvd., 312-432-0708; kavigupta.com, through Jan. 30. Chicago Cultural Center, 78 E. Washington St., 312-744-2947; explorechicago.org, Jan. 23-March 28*

"A Room of Their Own: The Bloomsbury Artists in American Collections," at Block Museum of Art. While E.M. Forster and

Virginia Woolf were penning novels, others in their Bloomsbury group were busy with paintings, drawings and decorative objects. More than 150 works are here. *40 Arts Circle Drive, Evanston, 847-491-4000; blockmuseum.northwestern.edu, Jan. 15-March 14*

Andreas Fischer, "Ghost Town" at Hyde Park Art Center. Chicago-based Fischer has culled his most recent works from Gold Rush-era portraits of average folks, bringing them to life with bright blotches of color and an eerie penchant for shadow. *5020 S. Cornell Ave., 773-324-5520; hydeparkart.org, Jan. 21-Feb. 27*



Recent Acquisitions of Czech Photography from The Baruch Foundation, at Museum of Contemporary Photography. Until its close in 2006, the local gallery run by Anne and Jacques Baruch collected and

housed all the Czech photography worth viewing. *600 S. Michigan Ave., 312-369-8067; mocp.org, Jan. 29-March 28*

The Papercut Haggadah by Archie Granot at Loyola University Museum of Art. Granot has been cutting art from paper for 30 years, including this wildly modern, graphic interpretation of the Haggadah — the historical Jewish text that tells the story of Passover. *820 N. Michigan Ave., 312-915-7600; luc.edu/luma, Feb. 10-May 9*



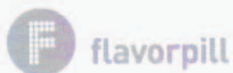
The work of abstract painter Angel Otero, 28, will be shown in two venues this winter. E. JASON WAMBSGANS/TRIBUNE PHOTO

"The Darker Side of Light: Arts of Privacy, 1850-1900," at Smart Museum of Art. This traveling exhibition of prints, drawings and small sculpture features works never meant for the public, plucked from the collections of melancholy Europeans. *5550 S. Greenwood Ave., 773-702-0200; smartmuseum.uchicago.edu, Feb. 11-June 13*

William Eggleston, "Democratic Camera, Photographs and Video, 1961-2008," at Art Institute. One of the early

pioneers of color photography, Eggleston is celebrated in this large retrospective — his first in the United States. *111 S. Michigan Ave., 312-443-3600; artic.edu, Feb. 27-May 23*

White/Light at Museum of Contemporary Art. Here's your chance to go backstage with local eclectic-electric duo White/Light, which takes over the MCA's 12-by-12 space with a multilayered soundscape installation. *220 E. Chicago Ave., 312-280-2660; mcachicago.org, March 6-28*



Art: Photography
50% Grey

When

Jan 29 – Mar 28

Mondays–Wednesdays (10am–5pm)

Thursdays (10am–8pm)

Fridays–Saturdays (10am–5pm)

Sundays (noon–5pm)

Where

Museum of Contemporary Photography (600 S Michigan Ave, 312.663.5554)

Price

FREE

Details

http://www.mocp.org/exhibitions/2010/01/contemporary_cz.php



Full of black-and-white photographs with unassuming subject-matter, mostly tacked to the walls without frames, *50% Grey* is resolutely low-key. That's not to suggest that this slice of recent Czech photography is by any means bland. It just requires you to embrace subtle perceptual experiments, conceptual juxtapositions, and unfolding changes (thus the prevalence of photo sequences). The six featured artists are often dealing with time and space, or the vagaries of photography itself; take Štěpán Grygar, who repeatedly shot a single street view using different camera exposures so falling snowflakes transform the composition. On view also is a collection of Czech photographs spanning the last century, a reminder of the country's rich history of photographic practice.

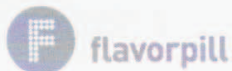
– *Karsten Lund*



Get to know us

Flavorpill covers cultural events, art, books, music, and world news.

[Join now](#)



Film: Animation

Jirí Trnka

When

Thursday Feb 18 (6:15pm)

Where

Columbia College Chicago (624 S. Wabash Building, 6th floor, room 602)

Price

FREE

Details

<http://www.mocp.org/events/2010/02/>

It's difficult to overstate Jirí Trnka's impact on stop-motion puppet animation, from the Brothers Quay to fellow Czech Jan Svankmajer. Today, MoCP screens some of Trnka's surreal animated shorts, including his final masterpiece, *The Hand* (1965). An unassuming sculptor is attempting to craft a simple pot when a giant hand intrudes upon his modest home, reshaping the artist's clay into its own image. What initially feels like proto-*Mr. Bill* dark slapstick quickly becomes something more political. The hand eventually takes control of the artist's television and newspaper, attaches marionette strings to his body, tosses him in a cage, and directly manipulates his work. The anti-Stalinist subtext wasn't lost on the government: this magical, 18-minute polemic was banned for nearly 20 years.

—*Stephen Gossett*



Get to know us

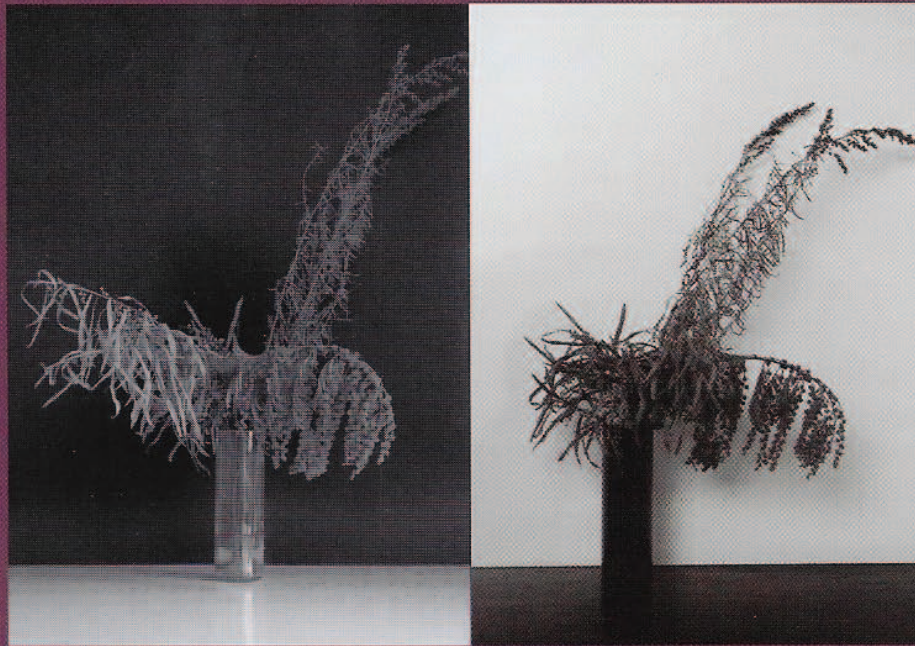
Flavorpill covers cultural events, art, books, music, and world news.

[Join now](#)

January 29 - March 28, 2010

50% GREY: CONTEMPORARY CZECH PHOTOGRAPHY RECONSIDERED

Stěpán Grygar / Jasanský/Polák /
Markéta Othová / Michal Pěchouček /
Jiří Thýn



MoCP

Museum of
Contemporary Photography

600 S. Michigan Ave.,
Chicago, Illinois 60605
312 663 5554
mocp@colum.edu

mocp.org

Columbia

COLLEGE CHICAGO

Markéta Othová, *Untitled*,
2008, Courtesy of the
artist and Jiří Švestka
Gallery, Prague



SAIC School of the Art Institute of Chicago VISITING ARTISTS PROGRAM SPRING 2010 LECTURE SERIES

Home | About Newcity Art

Search

NEWCITY Art

Reviews, profiles and news about art in Chicago

FEB 22

Review: 50% Grey: Contemporary Czech Photography Reconsidered/Museum of Contemporary Photography

Photography, South Loop

Add comment

RECOMMENDED

Tenaciously resistant to postmodern cultural play, the six contemporary Prague-based Czech photographers who have been brought together here by curators Karel Cisar and Karen Irvine continue their country's poetic modernist tradition with evocative black-and-white and color images of ordinary objects, moody spaces and mild constructivist angle shots that exude worn, tired and poignant emotions that are mirrored in their subjects. Although the curators advise that the show "represents a small, very specific slice of photography in the Czech Republic today," it remains that such works are rarely being made elsewhere at the present time and are a throwback to the golden age of Czech photography between the two world wars. The restrained mundane sensibility, in which decay is never so rife as to resemble ruins, is most perfectly captured in Marketa Othova's study of a shiny tiled floor littered with a few dispersed scraps of foam board that appear to have fallen from the ceiling, signaling disrepair that has not come anywhere near the brink of destruction. While the world outside Western Europe forges ahead with bold experiments, these artists look backwards and are frozen into pillars of the past. (Michael Weinstein)



Štěpán Grygar, Street (Prague), 2002.

Through March 28 at the Museum of Contemporary Photography, 600 S. Michigan.

ShareThis

You must be [logged in](#) to post a comment.



**A Procession of Them: *The Plight of the Mentally Disabled*
Photographs by Eugene Richards**

OPENING RECEPTION AND LECTURE BY EUGENE RICHARDS:
Thursday, February 11, 5 - 8 p.m. Gage Gallery [CLICK FOR MORE INFORMATION](#)



[Home](#) | [About Newcity Art](#) |

NEWCITY Art

Reviews, profiles and news about art in Chicago

MAR 01

Review: The Anne and Jacques Baruch Collection of Czech Photography/Museum of Contemporary Photography

Photography, South Loop

[Add comment](#)

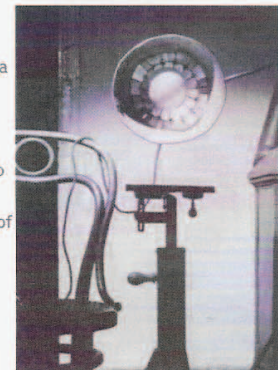
RECOMMENDED

From 1967 through 2002, Chicago's Baruch Gallery played a unique role as the only space outside Czechoslovakia that specialized in showcasing that country's rich photographic tradition. In putting images from the Baruch collection's deep reserves on public display at the Museum of Contemporary Photography, curator Karen Irvine has performed a service by exposing the Czech modernist tradition's variety, ranging from the grandmaster Jan Sudek's emotive studies of cityscapes and intimate landscapes, through Jaroslav Rossler's cubist abstractions, to Jan Saudek's kinky and decadent surrealist scenarios shot in his basement studio during the Communist era. Spanning the period between the first world war and the early post-Communist years, the images here by nine of the most important Czech photographers will convince the viewer of the pertinence of the widespread critical judgment that mid-twentieth century photography was dominated by France, Germany, the United States and Czechoslovakia. Look at Sudek's deep and clouded study of a strand of trees in the mist and you will know why Anne Baruch embraced and loved the Czech tradition for its "poetic modernism." (Michael Weinstein)

Through March 28 at the *Museum of Contemporary Photography*, 600 S. Michigan.

ShareThis

You must be [logged in](#) to post a comment.



Václav Chochola, "Lamp," 1947